

Wisdom, Strength

This ceiling painting by Laureti is found in the Constantine Room of the papal apartments. It is a symbolic celebration of the triumph of Christianity over paganism, set in a classical architectural space. The remains of a crushed Hermes lies broken in pieces on the floor, while a crucifix of Jesus Christ sits upon the pedestal.

It is fitting that this painting crowns the papal hall honoring Constantine, the first Roman emperor to leave paganism and be baptized a Christian. Constantine had four basilicas built in Rome—including St. Peter’s—and gave Christians freedom of religion in the Roman Empire.

The message is clear. The Romans worshiped statues of gods who were mere human creations and

projections. In the statue’s place is not just another statue but a crucifix that reminds us of a reality, a historical event. God himself became human in Jesus Christ and showed his divine strength by emptying himself and being crushed by our sins in order to forgive and win back a rebellious humanity.

This show of godly power through weakness is foolishness to the Gentiles and inconceivable to the Jews. Yet this humility and love is the wisdom that confounds and the strength that saves.

Religion isn’t a business or human invention for personal enthronement. Jesus overturns this idea like he overturns the moneychangers’ tables. Worship of God is all about accepting his

initiative and humbly responding in the obedience of faith and the purifying joy of love.

—Fr. Mark Haydu, LC

For Reflection

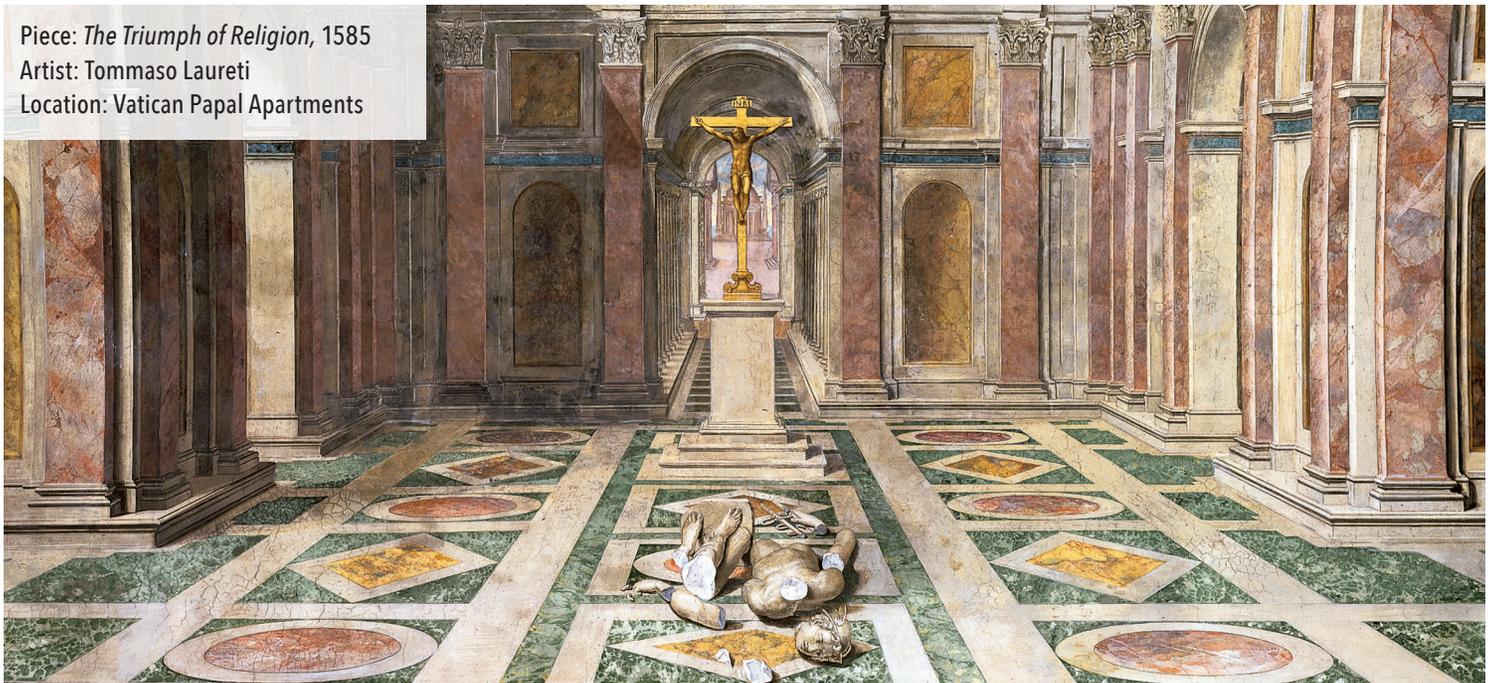
How does my faith foster humility in me?

Are my Lenten practices helping me to be purified from sin and faithful to the gospel?

Piece: *The Triumph of Religion*, 1585

Artist: Tommaso Laureti

Location: Vatican Papal Apartments



[Jesus said,] “Take these out of here, and stop making my Father’s house a marketplace.”
John 2:16

Calendar

Monday

March 5

Lenten Weekday

2 Kgs 5:1–15ab

Lk 4:24–30

Tuesday

March 6

Lenten Weekday

Dn 3:25, 34–43

Mt 18:21–35

Wednesday

March 7

Lenten Weekday

Dt 4:1, 5–9

Mt 5:17–19

Thursday

March 8

Lenten Weekday

Jer 7:23–28

Lk 11:14–23

Friday

March 9

Lenten Weekday

Hos 14:2–10

Mk 12:28–34

Saturday

March 10

Lenten Weekday

Hos 6:1–6

Lk 18:9–14

Sunday

March 11

Fourth Sunday
of Lent

2 Chr 36:14–16, 19–23

Eph 2:4–10

Jn 3:14

Dear Padre,

Much time is given to purify the vessels after Communion. At another parish, two people bring the cloth and unfold it on the altar before the gifts are presented. Shouldn't the preparation and cleanup of the table be less significant than the Eucharist itself?

Our liturgy is a beautiful expression of our faith, and we value its simplicity and grace. When we celebrate a liturgy, we keep in mind the nature of a particular part and its relationship to the whole celebration. We want the Eucharist to be the clear, central part of the liturgy.

The preparation of the gifts is a practical rite that gets us set for the

eucharistic prayer; it is done with simplicity and few additional gestures. *The Roman Missal* says an “acolyte or another lay minister arranges the corporal on the altar” (*General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, 139) and places the chalice and other vessels. It seems appropriate for laypeople to help dress the altar, especially if they assist the entire Mass. Their actions should be inconspicuous and not extend the rite. These ministers



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can be lay faithful because they are encouraged to present the bread and wine, emphasizing the inclusive nature of the Eucharist (*GIRM* 140, 141).

The purification of vessels is tricky because it must be done by a priest, a deacon, or an instituted acolyte. Since churches use several vessels, this action can take time and be overemphasized. However, its placement in the Mass is flexible, taking place “after Communion, or after Mass” (*GIRM* 279) and should be “done briefly and inconspicuously” (*Introduction to the Order of Mass*, 138). These pastoral suggestions enable us to leave the purification of the vessels until after Mass so we maintain a proper focus on the Eucharist and the meditation that follows.

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A Word From Pope Francis

Men and women are sacrificed to the idols of profit and consumption: it is the “culture of waste”....[When] someone dies, that is not news. When the stock market drops 10 points, [it] is a tragedy!...People are thrown aside as if they were trash.

—General audience, UN World Environment Day, June 5, 2013

Healed Through His Wounds

Jesus refers to the story that Michelangelo painted into a corner of the Sistine Chapel. It is about the time the Chosen People were attacked by serpents and many were dying. God instructed Moses to place two serpents on a staff and lift it up over the people. All they had to do was look at the serpents to be miraculously healed of their bite wounds.

We have all been bitten by sin. This can be our own self-destructive choices and attitudes, or we can be victims of other's sins. Yet sin and suffering doesn't need to have the last word. We can overcome if we choose to look at Christ crucified and learn his lesson of love. Jesus teaches us to not be defined by our ugly choices or the wounds we suffer. Our wounds and weaknesses can become the place of our healing. Jesus wants to heal us. That is why he let himself be lifted up!

To embrace this healing is simple yet challenging. First it requires simple faith to believe you are loved by the Father, no matter what. Second we need a constant, often-denied effort on our part to sincerely repent and work with

God's grace to transform self-limiting attitudes and habits into virtues.

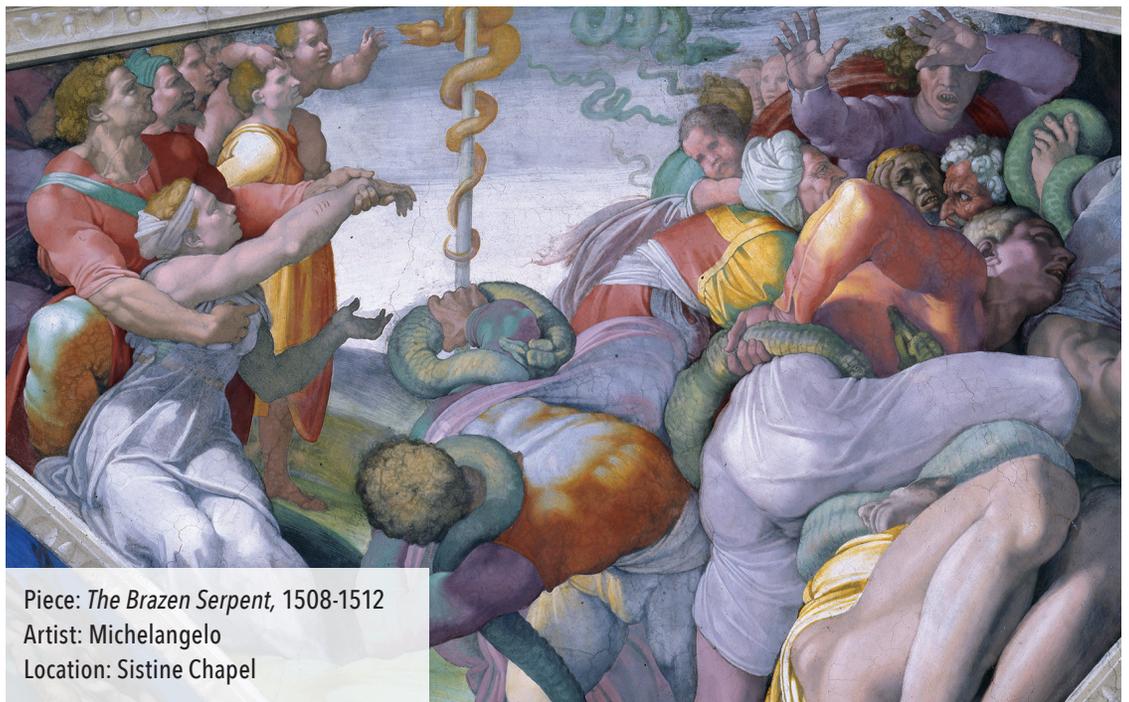
Even if you feel dead in your transgressions now, Jesus has already secured your path to life. Grace awaits you. The first step is to accept the love from he who is lifted up with arms outstretched to receive you.

—Fr. Mark Haydu, LC

For Reflection

Do I have any unspoken beliefs that, in some way, I am unlovable?

Do I need to repent from whatever attitudes or actions distance me from that love?



Piece: *The Brazen Serpent*, 1508-1512
Artist: Michelangelo
Location: Sistine Chapel

[Jesus said,] "Just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the desert, so must the Son of Man be lifted up."

John 3:14

Calendar

Monday

March 12

Lenten Weekday

Is 65:17–21

Jn 4:43–54

Tuesday

March 13

Lenten Weekday

Ez 47:1–9, 12

Jn 5:1–16

Wednesday

March 14

Lenten Weekday

Is 49:8–15

Jn 5:17–30

Thursday

March 15

Lenten Weekday

Ex 32:7–14

Jn 5:31–47

Friday

March 16

Lenten Weekday

Wis 2:1a, 12–22

Jn 7:1–2, 10, 25–30

Saturday

March 17

Lenten Weekday

Jer 11:18–20

Jn 7:40–53

Sunday

March 18

Fifth Sunday of Lent

Jer 31:31–34

Heb 5:7–9

Jn 12:20–33

Dear Padre,

A friend said he was looking forward to celebrating the Triduum. Can you explain that word to me?

The word *triduum* is Latin meaning “three days.” In the early part of the 1900s, most major feasts of the Church were preceded by three days of prayer and pious exercises in preparation for the feast at hand. Today we use the word to refer to the paschal Triduum. These three days celebrate Christianity’s most sacred events—the passion, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

The official beginning of the paschal Triduum takes place the evening of Holy Thursday, when we celebrate the Mass of the Lord’s Supper. This day is also referred to as Maundy Thursday, because Jesus gives a command



(*mandatum*) to his followers to be an example of love and service to others. The Mass of the Lord’s Supper ends in somber stillness, as the tabernacle is emptied and the altar is stripped bare. The priests, ministers, and congregation then exit in silence.

Good Friday is a day of somber quiet, as we relive

the passion and death of Jesus. The service centers on the solemn veneration of the cross. Holy Saturday is characterized by the spirit of waiting and quiet anticipation until the festive Easter Vigil, celebrated in the evening, when the Church comes alive with the new light of Christ and catechumens are joyfully received into the eucharistic community. The Triduum ends with Evening Prayer on Easter Sunday.

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A Word From Pope Francis

Jesus shows a particular predilection for those who are wounded in body and in spirit: the poor, the sinners, the possessed, the sick, the marginalized. Thus, he reveals himself as a doctor both of souls and of bodies, the Good Samaritan of man. He is the true Savior: Jesus saves, Jesus cures, Jesus heals.

—Angelus, February 8, 2015

The Meaning of the Gardens of Scripture

Focus on this painting and you will be drawn across the space between the gaze of Jesus and the chalice the angel offers. Sebastiano understands the essence of the agony in the Garden—the loneliness of Jesus before the bitter cup the Father extends to him via the hands of an angel.

Jesus' attitude in receiving this passion is evident in his open arms. Like the posture he will assume when nailed to the cross, he shows his humble acceptance and abandonment.

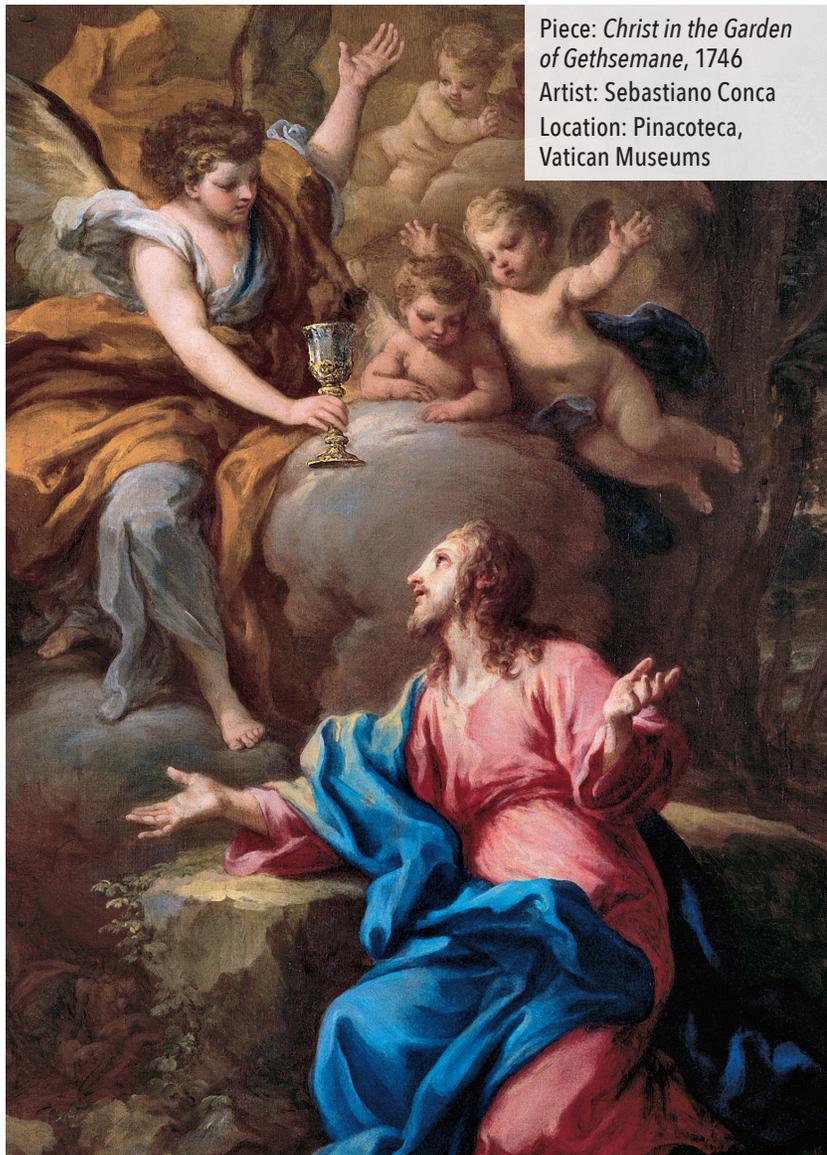
Gardens don't appear often in Scripture, but they are important. There is the Garden of Eden, the place of God's

creative love and man's original sin. There is the garden in the Song of Songs—a garden of passion, possession, and life-giving union. Where is Jesus' tomb, and where does Mary Magdalene, the transformed lover, find Jesus on Easter morning? In the Scriptures, gardens are a place of new life, sin, and redemption. It's where lovers go; where love is declared and tested.

This is important in understanding the drama of our Lord's agony in the Garden. It is the drama inside of love. It is the drama of acceptance and abandonment, trust and generosity, life and death.

Jesus knows this and goes into the Garden to do what Adam failed to do in the first Garden. He goes to pay the price of love. He engenders new life by giving his own. He looks at the chalice, the price of our salvation, and with a heart full of generous, uncomplicated love, accepts the Father's invitation. "Not my will but yours be done."

—Fr. Mark Haydu, LC



Piece: *Christ in the Garden of Gethsemane*, 1746
Artist: Sebastiano Conca
Location: Pinacoteca, Vatican Museums

For Reflection

How can I receive Jesus' self-giving love for me more deeply?

How should I imitate Jesus' self-giving love in my relationships?

*[Christ Jesus] offered prayers and supplications with loud cries and tears.
Hebrews 5:7*

Calendar

Monday

March 19

St. Joseph, spouse of the Blessed Virgin Mary

2 Sm 7:4–5a, 12–14a, 16

Rom 4:13, 16–18, 22

Mt 1:16, 18–21, 24a or

Lk 2:41–51a

Tuesday

March 20

Lenten Weekday

Nm 21:4–9

Jn 8:21–30

Wednesday

March 21

Lenten Weekday

Dn 3:14–20, 91–92, 95

Jn 8:31–42

Thursday

March 22

Lenten Weekday

Gn 17:3–9

Jn 8:51–59

Friday

March 23

Lenten Weekday

Jer 20:10–13

Jn 10:31–42

Saturday

March 24

Lenten Weekday

Ez 37:21–28

Jn 11:45–56

Sunday

March 25

Palm Sunday of the Lord's Passion

Mk 11:1–10 or

Jn 12:12–16

Is 50:4–7

Phil 2:6–11

Mk 14:1–15:47 or

Mk 15:1–39

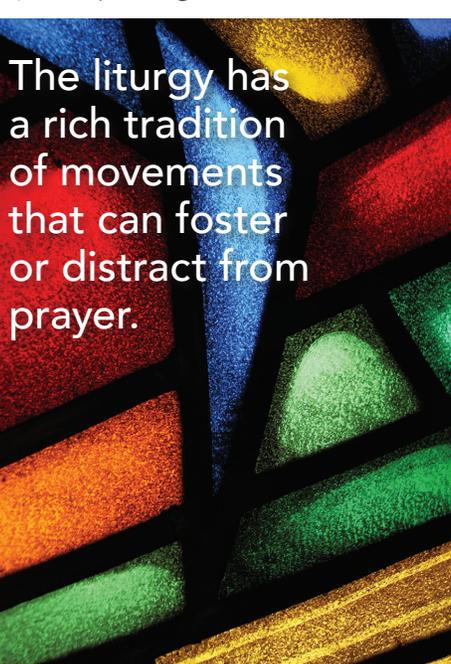
Dear Padre,

I feel self-conscious striking my breast at Mass. Isn't this gesture rather exaggerated?

The *Roman Missal* proscribes that the assembly strike their breasts at “through my fault, through my fault, through my most grievous fault” during the Confiteor. It doesn't specify striking three times. Later in Eucharistic Prayer I, the priest strikes his breast with his right hand, saying, “To us, also, your servants, who, though sinners....”

Clasping our hands in front of our breast is a recognized gesture of prayer; striking the heart or breast is an ancient penitential expression. It calls to mind Jesus' parable of two men who prayed in the Temple, a prideful Pharisee and a humble tax collector who “beat his breast and prayed, ‘O God, be merciful to me a sinner’” (Luke 18:13).

“Gestures, language, and actions are the physical, visible, and public expressions by which human beings understand and manifest their inner life” (*Built of Living Stones*, NCCB/USCC, 2000). The liturgy has a rich tradition of



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movements that can foster or distract from prayer. “When the gestures are done in common, they contribute to the unity of the worshiping assembly. Gestures which are broad and full in both a visual and tactile sense support the entire symbolic ritual” (*Environment and Art in Catholic Worship*, 56).

Thus, at Mass we bow our heads, bend our knees, and beat our breasts out of humility and reverence for God, “for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and the one who humbles himself will be exalted” (Luke 18:14).

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A Word From Pope Francis



If God could weep, then I too can weep, in the knowledge that he understands me. The tears of Jesus serve as an antidote to my indifference before the suffering of my brothers and sisters. His tears teach me to make my own the pain of others.

—Prayer Vigil to “Dry the Tears,” May 5, 2016

Acceptance of the Passion

There is a sharp contrast between Jesus' and Peter's acceptance of Christ's passion. Both are afraid, but while Jesus faces and embraces, Peter hides and denies.

We understand Peter's gloomy darkness, and identify with the confusion and weakness leading to his failure. Like us, he tries to follow Jesus, but at a safe distance. He wants to be close, but not too close. He wants to feel he hasn't abandoned him, to be there—but remains on the fringe.

But following Jesus always leads to moments of truth. Jesus and life have a way of bringing us full circle to face our true selves. Are we in or out? How deep is our love? This time, Peter's love for Jesus fails. But like us, Jesus looks at him with understanding and gives him a chance to be honest, repent, and follow him once again.

Jesus' acceptance of his passion is our example. First, he suffers freely. He's not being forced into a fate he cannot escape. As a result, he is calm, self-possessed, in control of his heart, and patient. Second, he suffers peacefully without resentment. He isn't constantly recriminating against Judas, Peter, or John during his trial or flagellation. He doesn't seek blame or payback.

Not only is he not bitter or resentful, but he is full of compassion and focused on others: on the elderly women, his Mother, John the Apostle, forgiving his tormenters, and leading the good thief to heaven. Let's enter this holiest week following our Redeemer and imitating his example.

—Fr. Mark Haydu, LC



Piece: *The Denial of St. Peter*, circa 1620
Artist: Pensionato del Saraceni
Location: National Gallery, London

For Reflection

Do I value the infinite mercy of Jesus, who forgives me whenever I turn to him sincerely?

What do I need to accept or embrace in order to love with greater peace?

Rather, he emptied himself...becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross.
Philippians 2:7–8

Calendar

Monday

March 26

Holy Weekday

Is 42:1-7 / Jn 12:1-11

Tuesday

March 27

Holy Weekday

Is 49:1-6

Jn 13:21-33, 36-38

Wednesday

March 28

Holy Weekday

Is 50:4-9a / Mt 26:14-25

Thursday

March 29

Holy Thursday

Ex 12:1-8, 11-14

1 Cor 11:23-26

Jn 13:1-15

Friday

March 30

Good Friday

Is 52:13-53:12

Heb 4:14-16; 5:7-9

Jn 18:1-19:42

Saturday

March 31

Holy Saturday

Gn 1:1-2:2 or 1:1, 26-31a

Gn 22:1-18 or 22:1-2, 9a,

10-13, 15-18

Ex 14:15-15:1

Is 54:5-14

Is 55:1-11

Bar 3:9-15, 32-4:4

Ez 36:16-17a, 18-28

Rom 6:3-11

Mk 16:1-7

Sunday

April 1

Easter

Acts 10:34a, 37-43

Col 3:1-4 or 1 Cor 5:6b-8

Jn 20:1-9 or Mk 16:1-7

Dear Padre,

Was the Mother of Jesus at the foot of the cross?

In John's Gospel the Mother of Jesus, his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene stood "by the cross" (19:25). Moreover, Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing by and spoke to them (19:26-27).

In Mark's Gospel, among "the many other women" watching the crucifixion from a distance were "Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joses, and Salome" (15:40).

Luke simply records that "all his acquaintances stood at a distance, including

the women who had followed him from Galilee and saw these events" (23:49). But he mentions three women by name who visited the tomb: Mary Magdalene, Joanna, and Mary the mother of James (24:10).

Matthew also has "many women" looking on from a distance. Among them are "Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James and Joseph, and the mother of Zebedee's sons" (27:56).

Only John records the presence of Jesus' mother and "Mary the wife of Clopas," who is believed to differ from Mary, the mother of James the

younger and Joses, and Mary, the mother of James and Joseph. Mary Magdalene is cited in all four Gospels.

"By the cross" or "at a distance" may indicate the location allowed for spectators at a crucifixion. However, it is possible that at some point they were permitted to approach the foot of the cross, as depicted sometimes in artworks.

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A Word From Pope Francis

Jerusalem, of course, means "city of peace." This is what God wills it to be....Yet sadly Jerusalem remains deeply troubled as a result of longstanding conflicts....May efforts and energies be increasingly directed to the pursuit of a just and lasting solution to the conflicts which have caused so much suffering.

—Welcoming ceremony, Tel Aviv, May 25, 2014